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RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 0069
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHDC
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUEAHLC/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000008

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2016

TAGS: ASEC ELAB EPET PGOV PINR NI

SUBJECT: NGO ACTIVIST: OGORI SYMPATHY FOR VIOLENT APPROACH
INCREASING

REF: ABUJA 3070

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (D & E)

¶1. (C) Summary: Violence as a vehicle to express frustration at the lack of economic development in Rivers State is gaining sympathy within the Ogoni community and will be compounded by a likely upsurge in political violence surrounding the 2007 elections, warned environmental and human rights activist Chris Newsome (strictly protect), a close ally of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). The dialogue between the Government of Nigeria (GON), Shell, MOSOP, and others claiming to represent the Ogoni has been ongoing for a year, but all the parties are seldom at the same table at the same time. The Ogoni relationship with Shell has broken down. The Ogoni see continued negotiations as useless. Many want a new company to operate the concession on their land. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a November 20 visit to Poloff, Chris Newsome, environmental and human rights activist and ally of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), told Poloff that some members of the Ogoni community have been considering embracing violence as a vehicle for change. Heretofore MOSOP has maintained a nonviolent policy and has tried hard to distinguish the Ogoni from armed Niger Delta militant groups that kidnap oil workers and attack facilities. However, as these violent tactics have literally started to pay off financially and publicity-wise, some Ogoni have become critical of MOSOP's pacific approach. For example, Newsome said militants among the Ogoni recently complained publicly that MOSOP's peaceful efforts have gained nothing. The government's failure to address their concerns has also had an impact on many Ogoni, Newsome said. Moreover, Ogonis are increasingly impatient with Shell. They see Shell's activities as suspect. For example, Newsome said Shell insisted on unrestricted access to the Yorla Well-13,

ostensibly to extinguish a fire that had been burning for several weeks. The Ogoni saw the move as a land grab, and feared that such unrestricted access would give Shell carte blanche to engage in other, perhaps objectionable activities besides just handling the fire. (Note: Newsome did not specify what activities the Ogoni feared. End Note.)

¶3. (C) The breakdown in the relationship between the Ogoni has reached the point where the Ogoni would rather another company replace Shell. The Federal Government has lost patience with the Shell Petroleum Development Company-Ogoni-GON dialogue process, Newsome said. (See also Reftel) Dialogue between government, Shell, MOSOP, and other Ogoni representatives occurs but the three parties are never together at the same meeting, Newsome said. Ogoni representatives such as the Local Government Area Chairman and the Ogoni's State Assembly representative are in the "government's pocket," further compounding the problem, Newsome said. The dialogue process has already stretched over 12 months because government and Shell are afraid to broach key issues, according to Newsome.

¶4. (C) Development projects ostensibly for the benefit of the Ogoni only benefit politicians, Newsome went on. A road constructed in Ogoniland leads straight to the PDP Chairman's village, and benefits none of the other villages in the area. More troubling, Newsome divulged, is the government's failure to provide consistent electricity to Ogoniland. The Eleme gas turbine provided power to the Ogoni from 2003 to ¶2005. Then it broke down. The government has still not repaired nor replaced it. Eleme is the Ogoni's sole source of power. The surrounding Ogoni area is not attached to the national grid, Newsome complained.

¶5. (C) Shell's pumping stations are in a scandalous state of
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disrepair, Newsome alleged, and are the source of massive environmental degradation in Ogoniland. The situation is currently being assessed by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), a process Newsome described as not having been vetted with the Ogoni. Thus far the UNEP team has only visited government house, Newsome said. However, during the team's next visit it will meet Ogoniland indigenes and experience the area's pollution and degradation first-hand.

¶6. (C) As the Rivers State People's Democratic Party (PDP) is highly centralized, dissenters and political opposition figures lie low, Newsome said. However, the potential for violence against government and oil companies will rise once the elections are disputed, which they invariably will be, Newsome asserted. As in 2003, weapons continue to flood the Niger Delta. Since the Delta has seen little economic improvement since 2003, Newsome warned, it is critical small NGOs act now to assess what leverage they may be able to exert over government and oil companies to mitigate violence in the coming months.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Political violence in Rivers State is a reality; it reared its ugly head this year during the PDP primaries and our interlocutor believes it will likely increase existing tensions in Ogoniland during the upcoming election season. End Comment.

BROWNE